



# Orientation Meeting One

## Background of People to People — High School

### Background

After WWII the United States and the Soviet Union found themselves in the midst of a major nuclear arms race and at the peak of the Cold War. Fear, suspicion, and a general misunderstanding of our two cultures grew exponentially. President Dwight D. Eisenhower saw the need for extraordinary efforts on the part of citizens of both countries to resolve their differences, lest the world should race down the road to annihilation. He founded People to People International with the intention that those involved would promote peace through understanding.

People to People Ambassador Programs represents the culmination of President Eisenhower's lifelong crusade for world peace. He felt very strongly that everyday citizens of the world wanted peace and could attain it much more effectively without government interference. He felt that the best way to do this would be by face-to-face contact through various cultural activities. Once these contacts were established, enduring friendships would be formed.

In a world made up of friends, there would be little need or support for stockpiling weapons. He also thought that if people could come into each others' homes, attend their schools, places of worship, watch how meals are prepared and how children are raised, then appreciation and tolerance for our global neighbors would be created and misunderstandings eliminated. Suspicion, fear, and bigotry would become a thing of the past. This was his dream—to have people realize for themselves that while we are all very different, our values, goals, and desire for life are very much the same.

In January of 1956, President Eisenhower held an international conference at the White House to meet with the top 100 business leaders in the United States to help him form the organization to be called People to People. They formed forty-two committees that would help people from different nations come together for cultural exchange. Some of the first committees were dedicated to music, sports, letter writing, and care of the disabled, as well as a working group for a floating hospital to help others around the globe.

Two men at this White House conference played an important role in making this program a success. Those two great Americans were Walt Disney and Joyce C. Hall, founder of Hallmark cards. These leaders knew how to create and share positive visual images and written expressions. They knew how to help people see each other in a more positive light and dedicated much of their work to doing so.

Walt Disney created the attraction "It's a Small World" after his participation in the People to People International White House conference. Since then, the attraction has introduced over 250 million people to the concept that we

live together in "one small world." One of Disney's dreams was that music, animation, and exposure to the positive images in the minds of the world's children would help its viewers form a more positive perspective toward those of other nationalities, yet still respect the concepts and principles of their own families.

It is wonderful that the original ideas discussed in 1956 still survive today. People to People International Community Chapters, Sister Cities, Citizen Ambassador Programs, and the Student Ambassador Programs in which you are involved were so successful that each took on a life of its own. Furthermore, all who have been involved with People to People have benefited in some way. The student who goes abroad gains new knowledge and awareness by being exposed to other lifestyles, not to mention that the friendships formed last a lifetime.

It is this type of individual personal growth that is the fundamental foundation of People to People. Although the Cold War is over, the need for cultural exchange remains. More than 400 armed conflicts occur daily. The world spends more money each day on new weapons and defense systems than the total amount spent for arms during World War I.

Is there still a need for a People to People program? Will it make a difference? This is a decision that each individual must make.

Were President Eisenhower, Joyce Hall, and Walt Disney dreamers? Or, can one person's individual effort or contacts between private citizens make a difference? When people believe they can make a difference, they usually do. When they believe that the knowledge and understanding gained from exposure to the beliefs of others can change their lives, it usually does. An ordinary citizen can change the world for the better and in so doing, become a part of something extraordinary. President Eisenhower believed this, and the success of People to People over the past 50 years is proof that he was right.

*"I believe the people want peace, indeed, I believe that they want peace so badly that the governments will just have to step aside and let them have it."*

*Dwight D. Eisenhower*  
in a British Radio Address